

## Certification Procedures:

Documentation .....	Page VI-1
Verification .....	Page VI-1
Required Verification .....	Page VI-2
Verification of Income .....	Page VI-3
Income and Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) .....	Page VI-4
Primary Source IEVS Hits .....	Page VI-4
Non Primary Source IEVS Hits .....	Page VI-4
Verification of IEVS Hits .....	Page VI-5
Wage Match and Unemployment On Line Verification .....	Page VI-5
Child Support Income .....	Page VI-5
Bendex/SDX .....	Page VI-6
Information Not Available .....	Page VI-6
Medical Expense Verification .....	Page VI-6
Dependent Care Verification .....	Page VI-6
Child Support Paid Verification .....	Page VI-7
Utility Cost Verification .....	Page VI-7
Residence Verification .....	Page VI-7
Alien Status Verification .....	Page VI-7
Social Security Number Verification .....	Page VI-8
Identity Verification .....	Page VI-8
Shelter Charge Verification .....	Page VI-8
Questionable Income .....	Page VI-9
Deciding if Information is Questionable .....	Page VI-9
Examples .....	Page VI-9
Management .....	Page VI-10
Management Exploration .....	Page VI-10
Denials Based on Management .....	Page VI-11
Household Composition and Size Verification .....	Page VI-11
Citizenship .....	Page VI-11
Voluntary Quit a Job or Reduce Hours .....	Page VI-11
Resource Verification .....	Page VI-12
Loan Verification .....	Page VI-12
Deductible Expense Verification .....	Page VI-13
Decision Without Verification .....	Page VI-13
Documentary Evidence .....	Page VI-14
Collateral Contacts .....	Page VI-14
Home Visits .....	Page VI-14
Responsibility to Get Verification .....	Page VI-14
Household Responsibility .....	Page VI-14
Designation of Collateral Source .....	Page VI-14
Worker Responsibility for Verification .....	Page VI-15
Certification Periods .....	Page VI-16

First Month of Certification Period .....	Page VI-16
PA Household .....	Page VI-16
Other Households .....	Page VI-16
Households with Frequent Changes .....	Page VI-16
Unstable Child Support Payments .....	Page VI-17
Stable Households .....	Page VI-17
Notices of Adverse Action .....	Page VI-18
Adequate Notice .....	Page VI-18
Exemptions from Adverse Action Notice .....	Page VI-18
Mass Changes .....	Page VI-18
Notice of Death .....	Page VI-19
Move From State .....	Page VI-19
Restoration of Lost Benefits .....	Page VI-19
Variable Issuance .....	Page VI-19
Pending TANF Approval .....	Page VI-20
IPV Disqualification .....	Page VI-20
Failure to Cooperate .....	Page VI-20
Drug/Alcoholic/Group Living Arrangements .....	Page VI-20
Recoupment Conversion .....	Page VI-20
Continuation of Benefits .....	Page VI-20
Continuation of Benefits Effective Date .....	Page VI-21
Adverse Action Pending Appeal ...../.....	Page VI-21
Adverse Action for Transfer of Resources .....	Page VI-21
Case Transfer .....	Page VI-21

6000 CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

6100 DOCUMENTATION

The Food stamp narrative must have sufficient documentation to support eligibility, ineligibility, and benefit level determinations. Documentation must be in sufficient detail to permit a reviewer to reasonably determine the basis for and the accuracy of the worker's case action. When questionable information is verified, the worker must document why the information was considered questionable or where in the case folder the inconsistency exists, and what was used to resolve the questionable information. Except when a collateral contact is used to verify residence or household size, the worker also must document why an alternate source of verification was needed (such as collateral contact or home visit) or the reason a collateral contact was rejected and an alternate requested.

In addition to the mandatory verification and documentation discussed in this section, narratives must contain the following:

- A.) The method used to identify the household member or authorized representative interviewed.
- B.) A record that the client was advised of DSS's fair hearing, nondiscrimination, and other policies required during the interview. The worker meets this requirement by checking the appropriate box "yes" that EA-339 was explained, on the ANAR Function on ACCESS.
- C.) Clearance of all discrepancies which exist between application forms completed by the client, previous case information, and the caseworker's recording and computations.
- D.) A record of all forms and correspondence to the client, including dates, if copies are not filed in the case folder.

6200 VERIFICATION

Verification uses third-party information or documentation to establish the accuracy of statements on the application or made during the interview.

The household has the primary responsibility for providing documentary evidence to support statements on the application and to resolve any questionable information. DSS must assist the household in obtaining the verification provided the household cooperates in obtaining the verification.

Households may supply documentary evidence in person through the mail, fax, or through an authorized representative. DSS shall not require the household to present verification in person at the food stamp office. DSS shall accept any reasonable documentary evidence provided by the household and shall be primarily concerned with how adequately the verification proves the statement on the application.

Section 6200, Verification, Continued:

Form DSS-EA-308, Information Request, or automated notice, Spec C NOTC, may be used to request verification or information from non-monthly reporting households. DSS-EA-349, Monthly Reporting Notice of Action, may be used to request verification from monthly reporting households.

6210 REQUIRED VERIFICATION

RULE: Households must cooperate in giving the following required verification:

A.) Applications/Reapplications:

- 1.) Non-exempt income, medical expenses, child or dependent care costs, child support paid (if an exclusion is requested), shelter charges, including utilities. (If the household fails to verify or chooses not to verify a child support exclusion or an expense, eligibility and benefit amount may be determined without that amount allowed.)
- 2.) Residence, alien status, the applicant's identity, and questionable information. Social Security numbers for individuals older than 7 months must be submitted however verification is required only if the information is questionable. If an individual does not submit a SSN, does not have good cause, and is at least 7 months of age, the individual is not eligible for benefits. If the household fails to verify alien status, the individual is not eligible for benefits.

B.) Recertifications:

Only require verification if the information has changed as follows:

- 1.) Reported changes in medical expenses if the expense is new, or if the amount of a verified expense changes the allowed medical expenses. Example: Household receives the \$200 standard medical expense because they previously verified drug expenses of \$40.00. If they report new drug expenses but the total medical expense is \$200 or less, verification is not required because it did not change the amount budgeted (\$200). If however the new amount increases the total medical expenses over \$200, it should be verified unless the household opts for the standard medical expense of \$200.
- 2.) Changes in legally obligated child support if the legal obligation to pay child support, the obligated amount, and/or the amount of legally obligated child support a household pays to non household member changes.
- 3.) Non-utility shelter expenses if the change is a result of a move or a change in household composition, the shelter amounts are questionable, or the shelter changed more than \$25.00. If the household fails to verify or chooses not to verify the change, eligibility and benefit amount may be determined without shelter expenses unless the expense is questionable. Questionable situations must be resolved.
- 4.) Utility expenses if the household has moved, the utility expense is questionable, or the household reports a change in the expense. A change in the expense means the obligation to pay the utility expense has changed, not the amount. Example: Jane reported she is now paying heat in addition to the previously verified phone expense. The heat expense needs to be verified before change the utility allowance.

6200 - Verification Continued:

- 5.) Income should not be verified unless it is from a new source or if earned income changed by more than \$100, or if unearned income, changed by more than \$50.
- 6.) Other information which is unchanged should not be verified unless it is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent, or outdated.

Households also must cooperate in getting verification of changes that are reported during a certification period. If requested by DSS, the household must designate a suitable third-party source of information and allow the EABS to make a home visit.

6220 PROCEDURES FOR GETTING VERIFICATION

6221 VERIFICATION OF INCOME

Staff must verify income at application. Verification is also required at each recertification and six month report form if the income is from a new source, earned income changed by more than \$100, or unearned income changed by more than \$50. When the client reports changes in income during the interim months, the change should be entered on ACCESS and verification requested. It is essential that the correct income amount is budgeted because Quality control and other management information show income is the most frequent area in which program errors and wrong allotments are made.

Customers usually can provide documentary verification of earned income such as pay stubs, W-2 forms, and income tax returns. Bookkeeping records, tax forms, or sales and expenditure records may be used as verification for self-employed persons.

Customers usually can provide documents to verify their other income. The following are suitable: RSDI award letters (be alert for later changes and cost of living increases); award letters for unemployment compensation, VA, pensions, railroad retirement, and similar benefits; support and alimony payments from a court order, DCS child support screens, divorce decree, or separation papers; contribution checks; and benefit warrants.

The State Verification and Exchange System (SVES) is a computerized verification system to request information from the Social Security Administration (SSA). SVES allows staff to obtain information from SSA on Social Security numbers, Social Security income, Medicare benefit information, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), 40 quarters, prisoner information and deceased individuals. An on-line verification is received 3 working days after the SVES request is submitted to SSA. The information received is a "snapshot" of the benefit information as it is the date the information is requested. The data is purged from ACCESS after 45 days of receipt.

Verification from other sources includes social security district office files, employer's records, union records, workmen's compensation records, Veterans' Administration, insurance company records, tax records, and Railroad Retirement Board records, Vital Statistics Records, obituaries, etc.

Customers who cannot give acceptable documentary proof of income must identify a collateral source the EABS can use to get the needed information.

6221.1 INCOME AND ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION SYSTEM (IEVS)

IEVS provides information on Social Security, SSI, IRS wage and unearned income, and Department of Labor for wage and unemployment information.

Information obtained through IEVS shall be used to verify eligibility, benefit amounts, and potential overpayments.

IEVS hit information is located on ACCESS at INFC/IEVP (information by individual) REPT/IEVW (information by Benefits Specialist) or REPT/IEVD (information by region). The IEVS hit may be resolved from any of the locations.

6221.2 PRIMARY SOURCE IEVS HITS

Social Security income (BNXV), Medicare premium amounts (BNXV), SSI income (SDX), unemployment income (UNEM), and disability (BNXV) information received through IEVS is considered verified upon receipt. BNXV, UNEM, and SDX are primary sources. IEVS hits from these sources must be acted on promptly. An e-mail is sent to the EABS and Supervisor on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month for all unresolved BNXV, SDX, and UNEM hits. Then another e-mail is sent on the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month if the IEVS hit is still unresolved. If an IEVS hit is received from one of these sources, the following actions shall take place:

- Review the information and compare it to the budgeted information in the record;
- If the income is budgeted, complete the IEVS screen with an action code of "BN". No further action is required.
- If the income is not budgeted, change the source code to the appropriate primary source (BNXV, UNEM, SDX) and budget the following 10 adverse action times for negative changes. Complete the IEVS screen with the appropriate action code.
- Complete overpayments, if appropriate.

6221.3 IEVS HITS THAT ARE NOT PRIMARY SOURCES:

IEVS information that is not considered verified upon receipt is unearned income from IRS (NWRK), wage information from IRS (BEER) or wage information from DOL (JOBS). These IEVS hits must be completed within 45 days. An e-mail is sent to the EABS and Supervisor for any IEVS hit that is unresolved 45 days after the IEVS hit is stored.

When an IEVS hit is received, the following actions shall take place:

- Review the information and compare it to the reported/budgeted information in the record;
- Resolve discrepancies via a contact with the household or appropriate source;
- Correct the case information following budgeting procedures and adverse action time frames (source code is OTH); and
- Complete overpayments, if appropriate.

#### 6221.4 VERIFICATION OF IEVS INFORMATION

If IEVS information does not meet the criteria in 6221.3 and verification must be completed on the discrepant information, it shall be completed within 45 days. Information needed includes:

- 1.) the amount of resource or income involved;
- 2.) whether the household actually had the resource or income involved;  
and
- 3.) the period of time affected.

#### 6221.5 WAGE MATCHING AND UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION ON-LINE VERIFICATION

Wage matching and unemployment files may be queried on-line. On-line wage and unemployment queries should be completed for all adult household members at application, recertification, and to verify questionable wage information. Wage and unemployment queries should also be completed when adding adult household members to the SNAP household. The files contain names of UIB recipients, employers, and wages persons received during a past period (not necessarily the last three months). Staff should use the information to plan interviews, to confirm the household's earlier statements about income, or to find income the household never reported. Wage information should be used as follows:

- A.) To examine the currency and correctness of the client's reported income. The information may not be used as the only source to verify income.
- B.) Applications and recertifications: To determine if an individual had recent employment termination which should be reviewed to make sure it was not a voluntary termination of employment or income that is on-going and should be reported.

NOTE: Give priority to potential unreported income situations. For example, the household has not reported any earned income for an individual for SNAP at application or recertification but the wage information shows the person has earned income during those months. Another example is if the monthly earned income is over the household's maximum gross income limit. While many of these situations are legitimate, others reveal large amounts of unreported income which must be quickly resolved.

Discuss discrepancies (between the wage information and file information from the same time period) with the customer. If it is determined income that should have been reported, the household is responsible to resolve the discrepancy and provide verification of the income, even if from a previous certification period. Households that cannot resolve the discrepancy or give satisfactory documentary evidence must designate a collateral source for the worker to use in verifying the information.

#### 6221.6 SPECIAL PROCEDURE FOR CHILD SUPPORT INCOME

DSS operates a child support enforcement program for TANF recipients. Under this program, court-ordered child support payments are made to DSS rather than to the TANF recipient. DSS denies the TANF grant if the amount of child support received equals or exceeds the grant.

6221.6 - Special Procedure for Child Support Income Continued:

The customer actually gets no income from the child support program until the TANF grant for that child is denied. At that point, DSS ends the TANF grant and the child support payments are directed to the customer.

According to state law, TANF recipients must return to DSS any child support payments they receive from the absent parent. When an EABS finds that a TANF recipient is getting direct child support payments, he must report that information immediately to the child support enforcement office.

6221.7 BENDEX/SDX

If documentary evidence of social security benefits or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is not readily available from the applicant, the EABS may verify income through the State Verification and Information Exchange System (SVES - Section 6221), Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX), or the State Data Exchange (SDX).

The SDX and BENDEX files are used to verify other eligibility criteria such as VA, RSDI, or railroad retirement benefits. If SVES, BENDEX or SDX information contradicts the household's information, the EABS may use the household's verification if it is more current.

Information verified through SVES, SDX, or BENDEX need not be reverified.

6221.8 INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE

Occasionally, the employer or agency which is the source of income might fail to give necessary information or even refuse to cooperate. In nearly all these cases, another source for getting acceptable verification can be located with the household's help.

When all attempts to verify income have been unsuccessful because the payer fails or refuses to give information, and no other verification can be found, determine an amount that can be used in the SNAP case based on the best available information and document the result.

6222 MEDICAL EXPENSES

Verify the amount of deductible medical expenses including the amount of any reimbursements before allowing the deduction. Verification of other factors is required if questionable, such as whether the service is an allowable expense or whether the person incurring an expense is eligible for the deduction.

When medical costs are claimed, but not verified, no deduction is allowed. (See Section 6240 and 5962.)

6223 DEPENDENT CARE

Verify costs for child or dependent care before allowing the deduction. If the dependent care costs are claimed but not verified, no deduction is allowed. (See Section 6240 and 5962.)



6223.1 CHILD SUPPORT PAID

Workers must verify the legal obligation of the child support payment prior to allowing the exclusion. Legal obligation may be verified via court orders (ie. divorce decrees, etc.), administrative orders, legally enforceable separation orders, ACCESS DCON panels, etc. Verification of legal obligation may not be used to verify the payment amount. The amount paid may be verified with canceled checks, wage or unemployment withholding statements, statements from the custodial parent regarding direct payments, receipts of third party verifications, ACCESS DCON panels, Clerk of Court receipts, etc.

6224 UTILITY COSTS

Workers must verify utility expenses to determine the correct utility standard. If workers cannot verify utility costs before the end of the 30-day processing period, or if the household chooses to not submit verification, eligibility and benefit amount can be calculated without the standard as long as the information is not questionable. Section 4123 provides more detail.

6225 RESIDENCE

Workers usually verify residence while verifying other things like rent, mortgage, or utility payments. Workers must use these sources as much as possible so that the household does not have to get an unnecessary separate verification for residence. Otherwise, the worker may use other readily available documentary evidence or a collateral contact for this purpose.

Verification of residence might be impossible or very difficult to get in unusual circumstances. For example, migrants or other persons new in an area may be living in campsites or cars, and might not have documents or a person or organization to use as a collateral contact. Workers do not deny the application under these or similar conditions if both the worker and the household have made reasonable efforts to verify residence but have not been able to. Such unusual circumstances must be thoroughly documented.

6226 ALIEN STATUS

An adult household member is required to sign a statement attesting to the citizenship or lawful alien status for each member of the household requesting or receiving food stamp benefits. The DSS-EA-301, Statement of Need, contains the Addendum, Certification of Citizenship or Alien Status and must be completed and signed by an adult household member. In the absence of an adult in the household, the applicant may sign for non-adults.

A non-citizen must provide proof of his eligible alien status before receiving benefits. When either a household or individual indicates inability or unwillingness to attest to the alien status for any household member, the person whose alien status is in question is an ineligible (not illegal) alien. If the individual is determined ineligible, we cannot continue efforts to obtain documentation of alien status. The household will, however, be required to answer questions and submit verifications about the excluded individual's income, resources, etc. The income and resources of those individuals are treated as described in Section 5500.

SAVE verifications are also required. [Section 3260]

6227 SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

As a condition of eligibility, each applicant/recipient must furnish a SSN for all members of the household unless the individual is less than 7 months old. If the individual is under 7 months old, procedures in Section 3720 must be followed.

It is DSS's responsibility to verify the number with the Social Security Administration, unless the number is questionable. Social Security numbers are verified via ACCESS through a monthly file exchange. Additionally if a SSN is questionable, SVES may be used to request verification from SSA. Once a SSN has been federally verified by the Social Security Administration, ACCESS will show a "X" code by the SSN on the MEMB panel. An "X" code is considered permanent SSN verification.

If an individual (or adult responsible for child 7 months or older) is unable to furnish a SSN or does not have one, and does not have good cause, DSS shall require the individual to submit proof of application of a SSN, or may complete Form SS-5, Application for a Social Security Number, in accordance with enumeration procedures if the request is for a duplicate number, or an original number for individuals over age 18.

Caseworkers may continue to accept a social security card or other official document to meet the requirement that an applicant or recipient furnish their SSN or SSNs. However, household members cannot be denied for failure to provide their SSN card or other official document as proof of an existing number, unless the number is questionable.

When an individual's SSN has been submitted to SSA for federal verification and the number was not federally verifiable, it is considered questionable. DSS shall require the individual to contact SSA for clarification/correction.

6228 IDENTITY

The worker must verify the identity of the person interviewed. If an authorized representative applies for the household, workers must verify the identities of both the A/R and the head of the household. Workers may use a collateral contact for verification if documentary evidence is not readily available. Examples of acceptable verification are driver's licenses, work or school IDs, or IDs for health or other public aid, voter registrations, wage stubs, other official documents, or combinations of documents. Workers usually should not accept a single means of identification, such as a social security card, which is easy to get and may not prove identity.

Verification of identity also is required when there has been a break between certification periods, or when the person interviewed has not been identified.

To protect the household, the worker must verify the identity of a person to whom he/she issues an EBT card.

6229 SHELTER CHARGES

Households are required to verify shelter costs and residency at initial or re-application. During the certification period, they are also required to report changes in shelter costs if they move or if the shelter costs change because someone moved in or out of their household. Therefore if a household reports someone moved in or out of their household, shelter expenses must also be reviewed to determine the correct expense. All shelter costs should be reviewed during the certification interview to see if a change has occurred, and if one has, verification must be obtained. Section 4123 provides more detail.

6230 QUESTIONABLE INFORMATION

This section explains how workers identify and handle questionable information.

RULE: A client is not eligible for benefits until the worker has verified questionable information that affects the client's eligibility or benefits. Information is questionable if it is contradictory or incomplete.

The client has the right to postpone verification of questionable information when required by the rules on:

- A.) Expedited Service,
- B.) Handling certain reported changes.

6231 DECIDING IF INFORMATION IS QUESTIONABLE

DSS considers information contradictory when the household's statements on the application or during the interview:

- A.) Are inconsistent,
- B.) Do not agree with information in the case folder, or
- C.) Do not agree with other information the worker knows.

Information is incomplete if there are gaps in information that need to be filled with facts. See examples in item 6232. The worker must carefully evaluate earlier case information he knows and thoroughly interview the client to find questionable situations.

NOTE: DSS does not apply different standards of verification because of differences in age, color, sex, handicap, religion, political belief, race, ethnicity, or national origin.

6232 EXAMPLES

This item contains examples of cases which cause errors in quality control and management evaluation reviews. Workers must be careful in interviewing these households to reduce errors.

EXAMPLE 1: Applicant states he has no resources. An earlier application was denied because bank accounts and property were over the resource limit. This situation is questionable, unless the contradiction has been previously resolved.

EXAMPLE 2: Client reports four persons in the household. Earlier, the household reported a fifth member old enough to work. The client does not mention this person or his income in the current application.

EXAMPLE 3: A household member is 66 years old, not working, and has an employment history. He states he has no social security or pension income.

EXAMPLE 4: A member reports being laid off or leaving a job. Even though the employer may have verified reason for termination and last pay check, he/she might know whether the member is working somewhere else or is getting unemployment or worker's compensation.

EXAMPLE 5: Applicant shows only one or two pay check stubs; or stubs with non-consecutive dates; or stubs showing a 40-hour week in an industry which has frequent overtime such as construction. These situations might require additional verification including contact with the employer.

EXAMPLE 6: The household includes a member who is employable but not working. The worker should consider contacting one or more of this person's previous or potential employers.

6233 MANAGEMENT

Workers must analyze how a household manages its financial affairs to see if income and resources are enough to cover expenses. Management is questionable and must be clarified if the household reports expenses over available income and resources (including non-budgetable income and resources).

EXAMPLE 1: A household is certified for several months with very little or no income and resources. Or, a household reports it had very little or no income and resources for several months before applying.

EXAMPLE 2: A household reports that it has not paid basic, mandatory expenses such as rent or utilities for several months but has not been evicted or had its utilities cut off. Workers should consider contacting the landlord or utility company.

6233.1 MANAGEMENT EXPLORATION

When management is questionable, the worker must explore with the household:

- A.) How the household manages its finances,
- B.) How long the household has managed this way, and
- C.) Whether reported income and resources are enough to explain actual household expenditures.

Total household finances are important when management is questionable. The worker must investigate excluded income or resources and non-budgetable expenses for this purpose.

For example, a waitress might be paid hourly but also receive tips; salesmen may receive a commission and a salary; construction workers often receive overtime; and farm workers may receive crop bonuses. Workers should consider income from these sources in explaining financial management and must document them in the case folder.

Another source of income workers should consider is insurance which covers household expenses if a member is disabled. Payments from this type coverage could meet all household needs and expenses including house, car, and charge account payments. Workers could probably count these as vendor payments in most cases; however, their existence would serve to explain management.

6233.2 DENIALS BASED ON MANAGEMENT

Questionable management or inconsistent management information is not in itself reason for denial. Workers must deny the case when the client refuses or fails to give information to clear a discrepancy. Workers must give the household a chance to clarify the situation and give reasonable help as necessary.

6234 PROCEDURES FOR VERIFYING QUESTIONABLE SITUATIONS

6234.1 HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND SIZE

Workers must verify household composition or size, if questionable. In most cases, workers accept the client's statement on who buys and prepares meals together to verify household composition. Questionable individuals who claim to be a separate household from those with whom they reside shall be responsible for proving they are separate to the CW's satisfaction. This provision also applies to individuals who are elderly and disabled (Section 2012) and who claim to be a separate household from those with whom they reside. School records, census records, income tax forms, documents used to verify identity, or other documents which show the number of persons in the home are usually acceptable to verify household size. Workers may use a collateral contact if documentary evidence is not readily available.

Individuals incarcerated in a Federal, State, or local correctional facility are not eligible for food stamp benefits. If the CW has information that an individual may be incarcerated, the worker could request a prisoner match via SVES. Additionally, a prisoner match is completed after application or recertification approval for all food stamp recipients. When a match or SVES information is received that indicates an individual is incarcerated, the worker must verify the individual's whereabouts. If verification is obtained that an individual is in a correctional facility, the individual must be removed following 10 day adverse action time frames. If needed, an overissuance report should also be completed.

6234.2 CITIZENSHIP

When a household's statement that one or more of its members are U.S. citizens is questionable, the worker must ask the household to give acceptable verification as listed in Section 3220.

6234.3 PERSONS WHO VOLUNTARILY QUIT A JOB OR REDUCE EMPLOYMENT HOURS

To the extent that the information given by the household is questionable, the worker must request verification of the household's statement about persons who may have voluntarily quit a job or reduced hours. If it is difficult for the household to obtain documentary evidence or suggest the names of reliable collateral contacts in a timely manner, then the caseworker shall offer assistance. However primary responsibility for verifying good cause rests with the household. DSS-EA-324, Income Verification form, may be utilized to verify reasons.

Acceptable sources of verification include, but are not limited to:

- A.) Current or previous employer; and
- B.) Employee associations; and
- C.) Unions and grievance committees; and
- D.) Qualified medical sources.

In the event the household and caseworker are unable to obtain requested verification of good cause from qualified and impartial sources or because the cause for quit or hour reduction resulted from circumstances that for good reason cannot be verified, such as a resignation from employment due to discrimination practices, or unreasonable demands from the employer, or because the employer cannot be located, then the household shall not be denied access to program benefits solely on voluntary quit or reduction of hours provisions.

#### 6234.4     RESOURCES

Workers must verify liquid resources if questionable. Workers may evaluate past circumstances and present living standards to find possible liquid assets. The worker may also ask where the household cashes checks, what banks were used in past transactions, or how recent major purchases were financed.

Workers must accept the household's estimated value of a non-liquid resource unless questionable. Careful interviewing is needed in some cases to help the household consider all factors when arriving at its estimate. The caseworker may compare the household's valuation with general information to decide if the valuation is questionable. Workers use general information in newspaper advertisements, realtors, the Small Business Administration, or other available sources.

When workers cannot get documentary verification of liquid or non-liquid resources, they may use a collateral contact or home visit. Workers must document the method used to get the information and the reason it was required in the case folder. Verification is at household expense. Workers may use form EA-208, Authorization to Release Information, to get information from nearby banks or savings institutions, or similar sources, to establish whether the household has accounts there.

Workers can verify the value of real property by multiplying the assessed tax value by the correct reciprocal, but only when:

- A.) No other documentary or collateral verification is available, and
- B.) The result reasonably represents the actual current fair market value of the resource.

#### 6234.5     LOANS

A loan is money paid to the household for its temporary use with the understanding that the money will be repaid. Before exempting these payments from income, the worker must establish through interviewing that the household is repaying the money or intends to repay. Workers otherwise consider the payments contributions and count them as income.

Workers must verify loans, if questionable. DSS does not require a legally binding agreement. A statement signed by both parties that the payment is a loan and must be repaid is acceptable verification.

If the household receives payments on a regular basis from the same source but claims the payments are loans, the worker may also require the provider of the loan to sign a statement that payments are being made or will be made according to an agreed payment schedule.

6234.6     DEDUCTIBLE EXPENSES

Workers must verify mandatory deductible expenses and expenses that are both questionable and deductible. Workers do not verify expenses that do not result in a deduction.

For Example: Rent, even if questionable, is not verified if the amount of rent does not change the amount of the deduction.

Unoccupied Home -- Households wanting to claim shelter costs for an unoccupied home must give verification of utilities costs if the cost is deductible. The household also must give verification of other shelter costs of the unoccupied home if the cost is questionable and deductible. DSS is not required to help households verify this expense if the only source of verification is outside the county of residence.

Utilities/Telephone -- For households claiming a utility or telephone standard allowance, the worker must verify that the household actually has an expense. There is no need to verify the actual amount of the expense.

Self-Employment Expenses - Self-employment expenses are budgeted at 55% of the gross income for the business unless there are no reported allowable expenses or the household requests actual expenses.

If the household requests actual expenses be budgeted, most costs of doing business are an allowable expense and may be accepted as listed on income tax forms or the self-employment ledger. However expenses must be reasonable and if questionable, further verification or clarification must be obtained. Questionable expenses could be large amount of expenses that are not reflected either for the type of business or the amount of income generated by the business. Expenses are allowed for capital asset payments, but depreciation is not. Also expenses cannot be duplicated thus any interest already claimed as an expense for the capital asset must be subtracted from the capital asset payment deduction. Refer to Section 4413.3 or the Self-Employment Training Package to find which self-employment expenses are allowable.

6240     DECISION WITHOUT VERIFICATION

If a deductible expense must be verified, and getting verification delays certification, the worker must tell the household that he can complete the case without giving a deduction for the expense. For example, the worker would compute shelter costs without the questionable and unverified information.

If the expense cannot be verified within 30 days of the application date, the worker must decide the household's eligibility and allotment without deducting the unverified expense. If the household later gives verification, the worker must compute its benefits again and increase the allotment, if necessary, according to the time standards for reported changes. If the household would be ineligible unless the expense is allowed, the worker must handle the application according to procedures for delays in processing.

When households choose not to verify a deductible expense, it will not be considered a Quality Control error providing that the options were explained to the household and the case narrative was documented to show that the household was allowed the opportunity to provide verification prior to certification, but opted to proceed without the use of the expense.

6250 SOURCES OF VERIFICATION

6251 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Documentary evidence is DSS's preferred source of verification and is defined as written confirmation of a household's circumstances. DSS may get documentation through the household or from other sources suggested by the household. Examples include wage stubs, rent receipts, utility bills, and similar documents.

Exception: Documentary evidence is not necessarily the preferred verification for residence and household size. These items may be verified through readily available documents, but if none are available, workers may substitute collateral contacts or home visits as verification.

6252 COLLATERAL CONTACTS

A collateral contact is verbal confirmation of a household's circumstances by the worker with a person or organization outside the household. Examples of collateral sources are employers, landlords, social service agencies, migrant service agencies, and neighbors. The worker may make collateral contacts in person or by telephone. The client names the collateral sources with help from the worker, if necessary.

6253 HOME VISITS

Workers use home visits for verification when documentary evidence is unavailable or to make a firm eligibility decision. Workers must schedule home visits with the household before the visit.

6260 RESPONSIBILITY FOR GETTING VERIFICATION

RULE: The household has the primary responsibility for providing documentary evidence to support statements on the application and to resolve any questionable information. When suitable documentary evidence is unavailable, DSS may require the household to designate a suitable third-party source for the information. Or, DSS may require the household to permit a pre-scheduled home visit. DSS must assist the household in obtaining verification if the household is cooperating in the verification process. Refer to section 6221.8 if the verification is unobtainable.

6261 HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY

The household may give documentary evidence in person, through the mail, or through an authorized representative. DSS does not require households to bring the documents in person to the certification office.

6261.1 DESIGNATION OF COLLATERAL SOURCES

Households are responsible for designating collateral sources. The household may, however, ask for help from the worker in doing so. DSS does not require the designation of a collateral in writing; but workers must document verbal designations in the case folder.



Many collateral sources (such as banks or other institutions) do not release information without written consent. Therefore worker must use Form EA-208, Authorization to Release Information, to obtain the verification.

Systems or records DSS has routine access to are not considered collateral sources and, therefore, are not designated by the household. Examples are BENDEX, SDX, or wage and unemployment compensation reports.

6262

WORKER RESPONSIBILITY

- A.) To ensure that documentary evidence the household gives is enough for the worker to make a decision of eligibility and allotment amount. The same principle applies to collateral sources designated by the household. Workers are not required to use documents given by the household or collateral sources when these do not give accurate verification. In this situation, the worker must ask the household to give more documentation, designate another collateral source, or schedule a home visit.

For example, information from documents or from collateral sources independent of the household usually are suitable for verification. Information from relatives, close friends, or other sources that have an interest in the household might be less reliable.

- B.) To take reasonable documentation given by the household or reasonable collateral sources designated by the household. workers must be primarily concerned with how adequately the document or collateral source proves the household's circumstances. Workers may not insist on one type of verification and exclude other reasonable sources. An alternate source frequently is faster and allows the case to be processed more quickly.

For example, an employer is unable to give wage information immediately and verification may take extra time. The household suggests an alternate source which the worker can reasonably expect to give accurate information. The worker should accept the alternate source if suitable and must not insist that verification come only from the employer.

- C.) To give the household a reasonable chance to resolve discrepancies if another source contradicts information given by the household. Workers must do this before making the final decision.

For example, a household member reported last March/April/May that he earned \$600 a month, or \$1800 total. The wage report shows he earned \$2400 during that period. The worker must give the household a chance to resolve the discrepancy before taking final action on the case.

6300      CERTIFICATION PERIODS

The worker must set a definite period of time a household is eligible to receive benefits. At the expiration of the certification period the household's entitlement to food stamps ends. Future eligibility is established only when the household gives DSS a new, completed application; is interviewed; and gives required verification. Food stamps may never be continued beyond the end of a certification period without a new eligibility determination.

6310      FIRST MONTH OF CERTIFICATION PERIOD

Certification periods must conform to calendar months, even when benefits are prorated on a daily basis. At initial application, the first month of the certification period generally is the month of application, even if the household's eligibility is not determined until a later month.

EXAMPLE: If a household files an application in January and the application is not processed until February, a 12 month certification period would be January through December. Upon recertification, the certification period would begin with the first month after the ending certification period.

6320      PA HOUSEHOLDS

Workers must ensure households with all members in a single PA grant have their food stamp recertifications at the same time as the regular PA review.

The worker must assign PA households food stamp certification periods which end the same month as the TANF review.

EXCEPTION: If the household is required to monthly report and resides on Indian Reservation land, they are required to have 24 month certification periods.

6330      OTHER HOUSEHOLDS

For households not required to monthly report, workers must assign the longest certification periods possible based on the predictability of the household's circumstances. The maximum certification period for any non-monthly reporting household is 12 months. Households required to monthly report and not residing on Reservation land must be certified for no less than 6 months and no greater than 12 months. Households required to monthly report and residing on Indian Reservation land must be certified for 24 months with no exceptions.

6331      HOUSEHOLDS WITH FREQUENT CHANGES

Workers must certify non-monthly reporting households for one or two months when they cannot reasonably predict what the circumstances will be in the near future, or when it probably will have frequent and major changes in income or household status.

Section 6331, Households With Frequent Changes, Continued:

EXAMPLE: Migrant worker households often are included in this category because income frequently is uncertain and subject to broad fluctuations during the work season. The uncertainty of continuous employment, weather, and other circumstances also affect these households. Households with a member on strike might be included here because their circumstances are often unstable.

6331.1 UNSTABLE CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS

A three month certification period may be assigned to non-monthly reporting cases without a stable history of child support payments (at least 3 months) who wish to claim a exclusion for legally obligated child support payments to allow them a chance to create a stable history of payment. (Section 4121.N (8)) \*

6332 STABLE HOUSEHOLDS

Non-monthly reporting households may be certified for up to twelve months if there is little likelihood of changes in income and household status. These include households with a stable income record and for which major changes in income, deductions, or composition are not anticipated.

6333 ELDERLY OR UNEMPLOYABLE

Non-monthly reporting households consisting entirely of elderly or unemployable persons with very stable fixed income will be certified for up to 12 months provided other household circumstances are expected to remain stable. These households include social security and SSI recipients, and persons who receive pensions or disability payments.

6334 SELF-EMPLOYED OR REGULAR FARM EMPLOYMENT

Non-monthly reporting households whose primary source of income is from self-employment (including self-employed farmers) or from regular farm employment with the same employer may be certified for up to 12 months, provided income can be readily predicted and household circumstances are not likely to change. Twelve-month certification periods may be assigned to farm workers who are paid their yearly salaries on a scheduled monthly basis which does not change as the amount of work changes. However it is recommended that certification periods expire the month the household anticipates filing income tax forms.

6335 MONTHLY REPORTING HOUSEHOLDS

Households subject to monthly reporting and retrospective budgeting not residing on Indian Reservation land must be assigned minimum certification periods of six months up to the maximum allowable certification period of 12 months. Monthly reporting households residing on Indian Reservation land are required to be certified for 24 months.

6400 NOTICES OF ADVERSE ACTION

Before any action to reduce or terminate a household's benefits within the certification period, the worker must provide the household 10 days advance notice before the adverse action is taken. The adverse action notice must be mailed to allow at least 10 days between the mailing date and the first of the month in which the change would become effective. The household has 10 days from the date the notice of adverse action was mailed to request a fair hearing. If the adverse action period ends on a weekend or holiday, and a request for a fair hearing and continuation of benefits is received the day after the weekend or holiday, the worker must consider this a timely request.

The automated notice or a manual Form EA-309, Notice of Action, is the notice of adverse action form. All notices of adverse action must explain the proposed action and the reason for the proposed action, the household's right to request a fair hearing and the telephone number of the food stamp office where collect calls will be accepted for households outside the local calling area.

6401 ADEQUATE NOTICE IN LIEU OF ADVERSE ACTION NOTICE

DSS may notify a household that it's benefits will be reduced or terminated no later than the date the household receives or would have received it's allotment if all of the following conditions are met:

- A.) The household reports information which results in a reduction or termination.
- B.) The reported information is in writing and signed by the household.
- C.) Based solely on the household's written information, the CW can determine the household's allotment or ineligibility.

If all of the above conditions have not been met and the CW is taking action to reduce or terminate a household's benefits, then at least 10 days advance notice must be given before the effective date of the proposed action.

The automated notice or a manual form EA-309 is used for adequate notice and should give detailed explanation of the action taken.

6410 EXEMPTIONS FROM NOTICE

Individual notices of adverse action are not required in the following circumstances.

6411 MASS CHANGES

A notice of adverse action is not required for certain changes initiated by the state or federal government which may affect the entire caseload or significant portions of the caseload.

6411, Mass Changes continued:

EXAMPLES: Adjustments to the gross and net income eligibility standards; shelter deduction; dependent care deduction; the standard deduction; the Thrifty Food Plan; adjustments to Social Security, SSI, and other federal benefits; adjustments to TANF payments; and other changes in the eligibility criteria based on legislative or regulatory actions.

6412 NOTICE OF DEATH

Notice of adverse action is not required when all members of a household have died. Notification of death may reach DSS through a newspaper, from contact by friends or relatives of the deceased, or by contact from other agencies or charitable organizations.

6413 MOVE FROM STATE

Notice of adverse action is not required when notification or reliable information is received that the entire household has moved out of the state. The household must be informed of the closure of their case no later than its next issuance date.

Generally, reliable information would be information from a source constituting independent verification, not requiring further verification. (Examples: employers, landlords, other workers from other programs, returned mail with an out-of-state address.)

However if the post office has returned mail with an unknown, undeliverable or new in-state address notation, a DSS-EA-308, Information Request, must be sent. If the household doesn't respond in the 10 days or if the information that is returned causes a decrease in benefits, 10 days must be allowed before closing the case or reducing benefits. Only out of state address changes are exempt from the adverse action time period.

6414 RESTORATION OF LOST BENEFITS ENDS

No notice of adverse action is required when the household has been receiving an increased allotment to restore lost benefits and the restoration is complete, provided the household was previously notified in writing of when the increased allotment would terminate.

6415 VARIABLE ISSUANCES

Notice of adverse action is not required when the household's allotment varies from month to month within the certification period to take into account changes which were anticipated at the time of certification, provided the household was notified at the time of certification.

6416 CERTIFICATION PENDING APPROVAL OF PA GRANT

No notice of adverse action is required when the household jointly applied for TANF and food stamps and has been receiving food stamps pending approval of the TANF grant, provided the household was notified at the time of certification that food stamp benefits will reduce upon approval of the grant.

6417 IPV DISQUALIFICATION

Notice of adverse action is not required when a household member is disqualified for intentional program violation or the benefits of the remaining household members are reduced or terminated because of the disqualification of that household member. The household still may request a fair hearing.

6418 FAILURE TO COOPERATE

Notice of adverse action is not required when a household fails to cooperate in providing required verification of a reported change. This exemption from notice of adverse action applies only when the household is notified in advance that its benefits will be reduced if verification is not provided.

6419 DRUG/ALCOHOLIC TREATMENT CENTERS OR GROUP LIVING ARRANGEMENT

Notice is not required when eligibility is terminated for residents of a drug or alcoholic treatment center or a group living arrangement if the facility loses either its certification from the appropriate State agency or has its status as an authorized representative suspended due to FNS disqualifying it as a retailer.

6420 CONVERTING FROM CASH OR EBT PAYMENT TO BENEFIT REDUCTION

Notice of adverse action is not required when DSS converts a household from cash/EBT installment payments on an overpayment because the household fails to make agreed payments.

6421 HOUSEHOLD REQUEST CASE BE CLOSED

Notice of adverse action is not required when the household voluntarily requests, in writing or in the presence of a caseworker, that its case be terminated. If the household does not provide a written request, the CW must send the household a confirming voluntary withdrawal.

6430 CONTINUATION OF BENEFITS

Households which request a fair hearing during the period provided by the notice of adverse action (within 10 days of the adverse action notice) may have their benefits continued as provided in Section 7140.

\*

6431      EFFECTIVE DATE

If a fair hearing request is not made within the 10-day notice period, benefits will be reduced or terminated by the next issuance period.

6440      ADVERSE ACTION DURING PENDING APPEAL

If a household requests a fair hearing on one adverse action and another change in its circumstances occurs which necessitates a second notice of adverse action during the appeal period, the household must be notified. (Section 7150 discusses changes during pending appeal.)

6450      ADVERSE ACTION FOR TRANSFER OF RESOURCES

A notice of adverse action should be sent when the worker establishes that an applicant knowingly transferred resources to qualify or attempt to qualify for food stamp benefits and that household is receiving food stamp benefits at the time of discovery of transfer. The notice should explain the reason for and the length of disqualification. The period of disqualification is effective with the first allotment to be issued after the notice of adverse action period has expired, unless the household has requested a fair hearing and continued benefits as discussed in Section 7140.

6460      CASE TRANSFERS

In transferring food stamp cases, a notice of adverse action is necessary when the household's benefits are being reduced or terminated.

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